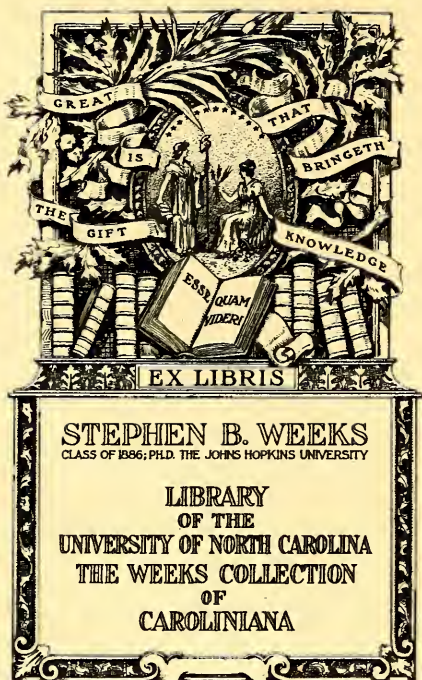


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Military Order of the Loyal Legion
War Paper 40
Last of the Blockade





Military Order



of the

Loyal Legion

of the



United States



COMMANDERY OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.



WAR PAPER 40.

The Last of the Blockade and the
Fall of Fort Fisher.



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COMMANDERY OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.



WAR PAPERS.

40

The Last of the Blockade and the Fall of Fort Fisher.

PREPARED BY COMPANION

Acting Master

FRANCIS P. B. SANDS,

Late U. S. N.

AND

READ AT THE STATED MEETING OF MARCH 5, 1902.



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The last of the Blockade and the Fall of Fort Fisher.

In the autumn of the year 1862 the sloop of war *Dacotah*, commanded by my father, Captain Benjamin F. Sands, was ordered to duty off the entrances to Cape Fear river, where there were but eight or ten vessels then engaged on blockading service.

As an acting ensign on that vessel I began my experiences in active service in the war for the suppression of the rebellion.

The need for supplies for the Confederate armies in the Carolinas and Virginia, and the great profit in cotton from the Southern States had brought forward from England a large number of daring spirits, who, for the great gain of the ventures and the excitement attending the traffic, were willing to dare the risks of blockade running; and month by month their numbers increased.

Charleston and Wilmington were the principal objective points for such ventures, and as the numbers of the successful trips increased the Federal Government taxed every resource to multiply the number of vessels in front of those seaports, and off the many inlets along the Atlantic coast.

All sorts and kinds of steamers were bought and fitted out with batteries of Parrot guns and howitzers; and the list of volunteer officers, taken principally from the merchant marine, was rapidly increased to officer and man these improvised gunboats, which were hurried to duty in the blockade squadrons.

As these vessels drew more closely their lines of blockade, the Confederates increased the number and strength of their forts and batteries, equipping them with the most advanced types of rifled guns that could be procured abroad.

The Armstrong 150-pounder; the 8-inch Blakelys, and the famous Whitworth guns soon appeared in these forts, and protected the approach of the blockade-runners after they had passed stealthily our outer line of blockade.

One of the most capable, untiring and efficient of the Confederate officers in that department was Colonel William Lamb who was on duty in command of Fort Fisher from July, 1862, down to the date of its capture, in January, 1865.

Old Fort Caswell, at the Western Bar entrance, had been improved beyond recognition by earthen traverses to protect its barbette guns, and near Bald Head Light, on Smith's Island, just opposite "Caswell," the addition of several batteries with Whitworth guns had made reasonably secure that entrance to the river.

From time to time, when seeking to follow in and destroy the blockade-runners near the bar, the greater range of those guns forced our vessels to seek safety at a respectful distance from shore.

When Col. Lamb assumed command of the works on Federal point, they consisted (as he has since informed me) of only a quadrilateral field work, one casemated work, with four 8-inch columbiads, and a one-gun battery. Only 17 guns in all were there.

As the daring and numbers of the blockade-runners increased, so the numbers and vigilance of our blockading vessels became greater. Our steamers kept in closer to the river entrances, and frequently chased the runners quite near to the shore batteries, occasionally driving them on the beach where they

were destroyed by our shot and shell. The wrecks of the *Ella*, the *Kate*, the *Hebe*, the *Venus*, the *Arabian* and the *Lynx*, long remained on the beach in testimony of the good work done by us.

Colonel Lamb says that there were 100 vessels engaged during that war in running the blockade to reach Wilmington alone; and that of these 65 were either captured or destroyed. We knew of 24 actually destroyed by our fleet there.

The New Inlet entrance was the favorite one for running. So important did the traffic become to the Confederacy in 1863-4, that the enemy had built a powerful ram to come out on dark nights to drive our vessels away, or by creating a diversion to give the runners a better chance to slip in or out.

Once only do I recall of its driving a vessel from her station, in March, 1863, and then the blockader, one of the light wooden craft, steamed off only a short distance, and then turning opened fire upon it and drove the Ram back inside.

The last I saw of that Ram was in June, 1864; she was hard and fast on the inside Rips, disabled.

From the date of his arrival Col. Lamb bent his energies towards increasing the strength and numbers of the fortifications on Federal Point.

The unusual activity of the Confederates, who, in increased numbers, were observed to be hard at work constructing the extensive works which soon spread from the face of Fort Fisher back to the river bank, called for special reports to the Admiral, S. P. Lee, commanding the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron.

In December, 1862, began the discussion of plans for the capture of Wilmington. At first Lee thought of New Inlet, but later, in January and February, 1863, the Fort "Caswell" entrance was thought of, and to Commander D. L. Braine

were given instructions to survey at night in boats to ascertain the depths of the channels and on the bar, with special view to entrance by monitors like the *Weehawken* and *Montauk*. Conferences were had with General John G. Foster, in command of the United States forces in the grounds, looking to co-operation with him in a movement towards Wilmington from Newberne.

About this time I was ordered to duty, as aid to the Admiral, on the flag-ship *Minnesota*, and was able to keep informed as to his efforts to secure army co-operation in an attack upon the fortifications at the entrances to Cape Fear river.

In March, 1863, the Confederates had evidently learned of a contemplated attack by the monitors, and, to enable them to secure a point for a plunging fire upon the vulnerable decks of those vessels, the construction of the great "Mound" battery of sand was begun about three-fourths of a mile from the main fort. The work on this was continued until in June, 1864, it was completed to a height of about sixty feet, and two heavy rifled guns were mounted thereon to sweep the channels; and at the same time they provided a greater altitude for their signal lights, thus communicating with the incoming blockade-runners to a greater distance at sea as well as further up the coast.

The Flagship *Minnesota* being then off New Inlet I made a sketch of the entire works, from Zeek's Island up beyond Fort Fisher, which the Admiral forwarded to the Secretary of the Navy with his official report as to the existing fortifications at that time, and this sketch appears on page 125 of Volume IX of the Naval War Records.

The sketch shows the five heavy gun batteries between the "Mound" and the main fort, then fully completed, and the line of protecting earthworks about five feet high connecting

them; and also shows how the main fort and these batteries were built upon the highest ridge of sand upon the neck of Federal Point.

These works were perfected during the year 1864, and were armed with 75 guns, most of them of the heaviest caliber and rifled, including the Armstrong, the Blakely and Brooks guns.

In October the formidable fortifications were further protected by the construction of the stockade or palisades, as they were called by some, made of heavy cottonwood logs, along the foot of the outer slope of the northern face of the fort, from its western end to and around the angle of the northeast bastion, and thence with several breaks in its line *en echelon* down to the line of high-water mark about two hundred yards from the face of the fort, the stockade being about eight or ten feet in height.

Pages might be written in description of the hardships and experiences of those years of continuous service on blockade duty on our coasts during that war; of the nights spent in open boats watching close into the channels of the river entrances; of the excitements attending chases of blockade-runners by night and day; of the boat expeditions and the engagements along the coast, in the James river and in the Sounds of North Carolina, such as Fyffe's attack on the rebel ironclads at the obstructions in the James river near Fort Darling; Cushing's several reconnoissances up the Cape Fear river; his engagements within the inlets when commanding the *Ellis*; his sinking of the *Albemarle*; Lamson's gallant work and victory on the Nansemond, and many other incidents of most creditable service, to give details of which as told me at the time by those brave officers would be interesting, as their recitals were made in familiar conversations and not in the dry, formal style of official reports, but these would make this narrative almost interminable.

On one of the trips of Admiral Lee to the blockading fleet off New Inlet in his flagship, the *Minnesota*, to inspect in person the methods in force to secure a close blockade, I had a most delightful and thrilling experience.

I was a witness, then, to one of the most admirable exhibitions of seamanship ever seen by anyone. I wish I had the pen of a Clark Russell to give it the graphic description it deserves.

In these days, when steam has superseded the use of sails in the Navy, and armor plates and steel frames have taken the place of wooden hulls, we no longer witness the pictures of the sailing vessels of the days of romance sung by Dibden and described by Marryat.

Whilst the flagship was on the station a terrific northeast gale one night struck the coast scattering the smaller craft, and the flagship, dragging her anchor, was forced to get under-way and make for an offing.

The current along shore, running to the southward, was sweeping the old frigate down towards Frying Pan Shoals, and her engines could not give her headway enough against the wind and sea to assure her safety.

This made it necessary to keep some sail upon the vessel.

The gale was so violent that she could carry nothing but topsails, and those double-reefed.

The gundeck ports were closed and almost buried under water as the old frigate heeled over under the blast. The rain in torrents cut us like whip-lashes, and all hands were at their stations. It was an anxious moment.

Every moment set us nearer and nearer to the shoals, and I was kept running by the Admiral to his cabin chart to note the depths of the soundings thereon.

With a report like a gunshot the foretopsail was suddenly

blown out of the bolt ropes into ribbons, and overboard; and it became necessary at once to replace it.

Lieutenant Joseph P. Fyffe, our executive officer, had been on deck since the beginning of the gale, and was almost fagged out when this contingency arose.

The captain, Napoleon B. Harrison, tried to relieve him, as did the fleet captain, Pierce Crosby, and even the Admiral tried to give him aid; but in the shrieking of the wind their voices could not be heard as far as the mainmast.

Fyffe, fortified by a stiff glass of brandy, ordered for him by the Admiral, resumed his post; and gifted not only with a voice like a trumpet but with the professional skill of the best of the old time seamen, he soon had a new foretopsail bent and carefully and safely sheeted home. The men seemed to know that a master seaman was on deck, and there was never a hitch or moment's delay in fulfilling his orders.

Fyffe was a man whose vocabulary was rich in choice, expressive, and sometimes unique, expletives; oaths of various degrees of intensity and expression took with him the places of commas, semi-colons and periods, a peculiarity which was fully accounted for by him on one occasion when old Chaplain Salter, in the presence of our mess, ventured to rebuke him for his apparent profanity; and Fyffe instantly retorted with "Stop that, Chaplain. You know that you pray a great deal and that I swear a great deal, but neither of us means anything by it."

Once during that day as I came above hatches from below to report to the Admiral from the chart the depths approaching the line of the shoal, as I leaned up against the gale I heard one old salt remark to another, as they were hauling on the braces, "Bill, I'd a damned sight rather *work* to the Lieutenant's swearing than I would *dance* to the singing of those others."

Fyffe held the deck, without relief or food, until long in the afternoon, when we had fully weathered the tail of that shoal, and he had the old frigate laying to in safety.

That piece of admirable seamanship, under the eye of the Admiral, together with many acts of gallantry in the face of the enemy in James river, won Fyffe his restoration to the active list; and he gained the rank of Rear Admiral before he died. The memories of my association with him in service are amongst the most enjoyable of all those cruising days.

During the last three months of 1864 the efforts to run the blockade became more frequent, and the needs of the Confederacy for supplies of arms, ammunition and other stores increased very greatly, and caused an apparent concentration of the swiftest blockade-runners from Nassau and Bermuda upon that point. The labors and trials of the blockading vessels were vastly increased by the demand for greater vigilance to head off those "runners," and, through storm and fine weather, along the whole coast, from Little River north to Cape Lookout, the watchful patrol was kept up night and day with zeal and devotion by one and all.

I cannot forbear, in tracing these lines, to express my great admiration for my old commander-in-chief, Rear Admiral S. P. Lee. This is fitting, since a study of him and his work is but a part of my memories of service in his squadron—on his flagship and as his aide.

From the beginning of his service as Commander of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron the records show, as to his conduct, unceasing, untiring devotion to duty.

Through his able subordinates the commanding officers of his greet fleet on the blockade, in the Sounds of North Carolina and in the waters of Virginia, the plans and instructions carefully studied out by him were most efficiently carried out.

No detail of the management of the vast work of that service failed of observation at his hands.

The multiplicity of the matters affecting the blockade, the providing of vessels for every service, of the assignment of the proper officers for every emergency of service in the Sounds and on the coast, the fitting out of expeditions against the batteries, forts and ironclads of the enemy, whether in the Sounds, in the James river or off Cape Fear river, all required and received careful consideration and action by him.

As his aide I saw his surpassing zeal and energy in transacting the squadron's business. In his personal inspections of the vessels in the Sounds and on the blockade nothing escaped his earnest attention. His every thought was for the success of the cause of the Union; and sincerely and often did he plan for the closing of Cape Fear river through the co-operation of his fleet and the army. That this was not realized by him was through no fault attributable to him.

I could but notice that (although no word of complaint was uttered by him) his every act seemed to be made with the extra caution and scrupulous care of one who felt that there was some adverse influence seeking to undermine him with the Department, and so his discharge of his duty was ever beyond criticism.

Through his repeated orders were secured all the exact information needed to post the Department as to the true conditions existing on the approaches to Wilmington, including the number and distribution of the enemy's forces there, the points most accessible and suitable for landing troops, and the depth of the water on the bars to guide an attacking fleet.

His good work merited the credit of command on the day of final success, but it was not willed that the honor of reducing Fort Fisher should be his. Secretary Welles, having deter-

mined at last to close Cape Fear river, first offered the command of that Squadron to Admiral Farragut, who was then at Mobile, but his ill health compelled him to decline it; and then Admiral David D. Porter was selected; and in October, 1864, he was assigned to duty as the successor of Admiral Lee.

The end of the vicissitudes of blockade life was now fast approaching. The capture of Mobile Bay had closed all the inlets to the Confederacy in the Gulf of Mexico, excepting Galveston Bay. The capture of Savannah by General Sherman, and his march northward toward Columbia, South Carolina, had effectually sealed up Charleston, as a useful port of entry for blockade runners, thus leaving Cape Fear river as the only remaining entrance for supplies for the Confederate armies.

The months of October and November saw assembling in the waters of Hampton Roads a large fleet of war vessels, drawn from all of the other squadrons; and the vessels were busy laying in stores of ordnance supplies for an attack upon Fort Fisher in which the army was to co-operate.

An immense flotilla of transports had been gathered there to carry the troops detailed by General Grant for that purpose.

The great ironclad *New Ironsides*, the monitors, the frigates and sloops-of-war, and many gunboats, strangers hitherto to those waters, were in the roadstead.

The vessels of the blockading squadron off Cape Fear river, then numbering twenty-one in all, had been by the Admiral's order assigned on paper to the several divisions of the new fighting fleet, according to size, armament and efficiency; but they remained actually under the command of Captains Glisson and Sands, as divisional commanders, still engaged in closely blockading the New Inlet and Western Bar entrances to the river.

From the *Minnesota*, I was, in 1864, transferred for a short time to the *Fort Jackson*; and when my old friend Lamson, formerly Flag Lieutenant to Admiral Lee, was ordered to command the U. S. S. *Gettysburg*, I was ordered to duty under him, and saw much active work in chasing and capturing blockade runners.

I was in Beaufort Harbor on the *Gettysburg* when the old *Louisiana*, which had been altered to the appearance of a blockade-runner, came in and took an out-of-the-way place for anchorage. She had been loaded with bags and barrels of powder aggregating over 200 tons, and fuses and slow matches were placed and wound through these opened barrels and bags in the expectation that the burning fuses would at the proper moment cause an explosion so violent as to disable the fort.

The intrepid Rhind, who with a small but gallant crew had volunteered for the dangerous task of running the *Louisiana* into position on the bar near the fort, was in charge.

The great fleet sailed from Hampton Roads on the 18th of December, and soon reached the offing near Beaufort Harbor.

The understanding between Admiral Porter and General Butler was that the transports should follow the fleet and await off shore notice that everything was ready for the attack.

Instead of doing that General Butler and some of his transports proceeded direct to the neighborhood of Fort Fisher with flags all flying, thus notifying the enemy that the movement was against that point.

A gale set in on the 20th, which drove the transports off shore and even disorganized the fleet formation, and delayed the starting of the fleet for the place of rendezvous about 25 miles east of Fort Fisher.

On the 22d, the lines of the fleet were formed at the appointed place, but the sea was still rough; so the division anchored in line, in about seventeen fathoms of water, to hold their positions; the smaller craft being detailed to keep near the monitors during the night in case of assistance being needed.

The rising seas kept the decks of the monitors awash, and trying, indeed, must have been the experiences of their crews below decks. During the night several dragged anchors and signalled for aid, and they had to be held in position by hawsers run from the smaller steamers.

Our anxiety was relieved when, at dawn on the 23d, one after another of the vessels of the fleet was accounted for and reported safe.

My captain, Roswell H. Lamson, was selected by the Admiral to take charge of the little *Wilderness*, the swiftest of the steamers present, to accompany the *Louisiana* on her mission of destruction, and was soon off on that duty.

When darkness came on the *Louisiana* and her little escort were seen slowly moving in towards the fort, and hour by hour the fleet awaited the result anxiously.

How Rhind carried out his dangerous mission has been often told. He and his crew at midnight, having anchored within 300 yards of the shore, near the fort, after lighting the slow matches and fuses, escaped in safety to the *Wilderness* and were brought out to the fleet. At 1.45 A. M. on the 24th the explosion occurred, but was simply a fine piece of pyrotechnics with no good results following. At daylight the fleet of fifty-six vessels in all steamed into the bombardment, and the garrison on the parapets gave us to know that they were ready for action. Butler's transports had not yet reappeared, but signal was made by the Admiral for the divisions, in order, to move into their assigned positions.

In the first division, at the head, steamed the *Santiago de Cuba*, under Glisson, followed by the *Fort Jackson*, under Sands. Each vessel moved on in silence until its position was reached, when it anchored and opened fire upon the fort.

The monitors and the *New Ironsides* anchored together close in shore, to the northeast of the angle of the fort, and the frigates and sloops-of-war, forming the second division; and the *Brooklyn* with the gunboats were in line outside of them to the southward.

So prompt and skilful were the commanding officers of the vessels in handling them that with the first gun from the leading ship it seemed as if a line of fire ran down the whole face of the fleet. The roar of the guns then became incessant, and the flying sand on the fortifications from the "Mound" on the south, to the traverses on the northern face of Fort Fisher, told of the general accuracy and destructiveness of our fire.

The guns of the enemy were not silent. From the two heavy rifled guns on the "Mound," from the great Armstrong gun, and all the heavy guns along the traverses of the fort, came the shot and shell over and into the line of vessels.

Now and then a bursting Parrott gun caused dismay in the fleet here and there, but no vessel left the line, and all day the fury of the bombardment was on, and as a spectacle it was simply grand.

At sunset the transports of General Butler began to appear, but too late for any action then.

During the night of the 24th December, designated vessels kept up the fire to prevent the enemy from repairing damage done to the batteries, and on Christmas day the bombardment was continued.

Although the little *Gettysburg* had only one 30-pounder Parrott gun that was efficient at the range, Lamson was per-

mitted during that day's bombardment to steal into the opening between the vessels of the first line and take an occasional shot, and so we had the opportunity (similar to that afforded to certain commanders whose vessels were present at the battle off Santiago de Cuba) of claiming that it was our shot and shell which did all the damage that was noted when guns toppled over or flagstaffs were carried away on the fort.

On the 25th day of December General Butler's transports had all come to anchor, and, aided by the boats from the small steamers, with Commander J. H. Upshur in the *A. D. Vance* in charge of that task, the landing of the troops began.

We could see the regiments crossing the neck of land and slowly advancing towards the fort. At nightfall General Butler notified the Admiral that his force could not successfully attack the fort, and that he was going to withdraw.

Quite a fog set in during the night, and I remember the disgust that was expressed throughout the fleet when we saw the next morning as the mist cleared off that the troopships were sailing away. We could see no reason for this, as nothing had been seriously done in the way of attack on shore and we were looking to participate in the fight ourselves.

But General Butler evidently had made up his mind that it was no place for him, as the transports were filled they steamed away north.

It was not until the 27th, however, that the boats brought off the last of the troops who had remained on shore undisturbed by the enemy.

The last of the transports then sailed away for Hampton Roads, leaving the Admiral filled with indignation at the "*fiasco*" which had rendered useless all the extensive and expensive preparations that had been made after so much labor and study by General Grant and himself.

All the vessels not needed for the immediate purposes of blockading were withdrawn to Beaufort and Hampton Roads, where their magazines were refilled at once for service.

The Admiral and General Grant were soon again in conference, with the result that on the 8th day of January, 1865, Major General A. H. Terry appeared off Beaufort with a fleet of transports; and when the weather permitted they sailed with our reorganized fleet on the 12th of January, reaching the New Inlet entrance on the 13th.

Again the several divisions took up their positions as on the occasion of the first bombardment, and opened fire on the fortifications. The fourth division of light vessels, again under Upshur, superintended and aided in landing the troops, and by 3 o'clock P. M. 8,000 men, under General Terry, were landed, and a large quantity of stores of all kinds were put on shore by the boats of the "cracker flotilla," as we called it.

Whilst the bombardment proceeded, the troops had entrenched themselves, throwing up a line of earthworks across the neck of land; and had taken possession of the river bank and were advancing south towards the fort.

Generals Curtis and Ames have given their several descriptions of the movements and brilliant work of the troops under their command in the attack upon the fort, and I will confine my narrative to the part taken by the Navy therein.

Admiral Porter had long matured his plans for co-operation by the Navy in the land assault upon the fort, and from every vessel in the fleet detachments had been made up, and were armed with cutlasses and revolvers in readiness to land and assist the army; the marines and some few sailors only having rifles and carbines.

The contingent from the *Gettysburg* was composed of seventy officers and men under her commander, Lieutenant Roswell

H. Lamson, and I, an Acting Ensign, was next in command. It was close packing in the boats to get us all ashore.

Early in the forenoon the whole force of sailors, some 1,600 in all, and 400 marines, were in their boats and soon made for the shore. The sea was calm and no surf on the beach, which we speedily reached, about a mile and a half above the fort.

The sailors were formed into three divisions. A small force of men were detached from each division, and supplied with shovels was at once advanced towards the fort under Flag Lieutenant S. W. Preston, and soon was engaged throwing up lines of rifle-pits one after another, from which, as sharpshooters, those armed with carbines, and some of the marines, were expected to clear the enemy from the parapets when the movement forward of the main assaulting party was begun.

The first division was under the command of Lieutenant Commander Cushman of the *Wabash*.

The second division was under the command of Lieutenant Commander James Parker of the *Minnesota*. To this division the men from the *Gettysburg* were attached.

The third division was commanded by Lieutenant Commander T. O. Selfridge, commanding the *Huron*. The marines, about 400 in number, under Captain Dawson, formed a separate division, and were advanced on the right of the brigade of sailors, and occupied the rifle-pits facing the north front of the fort and nearest to the Army.

The formation of the divisions for the assault was soon completed, and we were awaiting for orders to move.

After some time Fleet Captain K. R. Breeze appeared, coming from a consultation with General Terry, and read to the assembled officers the Admiral's orders under which he assumed command. Lieutenant Commander Parker waived his seniority in rank and resumed command of his division.

Detailed instructions from the Admiral, set out in his famous general order, were read to us, directing us to "board the fort with a rush," and enjoining upon us that, if after we had captured the fort we "were fired upon from the 'Mound' *every three men were to take a prisoner and throw him* over to the other side of the walls" towards his friends to receive their fire.

The cool assumptions as to the certainty of our success with cutlasses and revolvers against the Enfield rifles of an enemy about equalling our own force in numbers and protected by such heavy earthworks, and its delightful (if absurd) confidence in our physical powers as animated "catapults," caused a ripple of audible smiles to run down our ranks, and cheered us up considerably for the coming task of the "forlorn hope" upon which we were about to enter.

Shortly after 3 o'clock P. M. the divisions were ordered to move upon the fort, and, as quickly as we could march over the fine dry sand, we passed the line of rifle-pits that had been thrown up and from which the marines had moved on.

Captain Breeze having determined to make the assault upon the northeast bastion ordered the division, as they passed the rifle-pits, to move by the left flank down to the beach, on the damp, compact surface of which, the tide having fallen, it was comparatively easy to march.

As we moved down parallel to the north face of the fort, the enemy, from a light Whitworth gun emplaced in an earth-work, covering a sally-port running through the works on the level of the palisades about the middle of that face, opened fire upon us, but overshot every time, merely causing us to quicken our movement towards the beach.

Turning south the assaulting column at quickstep went on until within about five hundred yards of the fort, when we were

ordered to lie down on the slope of the beach below the line of rifle fire being poured into us from the fort, to rest preparatory to the final charge.

Overhead went the shot and shell between the fort and fleet, occasional short fuses causing premature explosions of shells, whose fragments wounded numbers of our men.

The roar of the bombardment was continuous and terrific, and we could see that the heavy rain of shells from the vessels had cleared the parapet of its defenders.

Finally about 3.30 P. M. a shrill whistle from the flagship gave the signal responded to by similar whistles throughout the fleet, and stopped the fire of every vessel except such as could direct their guns upon the southern line of batteries beyond the main fort.

In an instant the order to advance was given by Captain Breeze, and the divisions, in their order, arose with cheers, each boat's crew unfurling its flag, and moved on the run down the beach.

I recall, as though it were yesterday, the gallant Parker's appearance, wearing a long loose talma overcoat, as on the right flank of our division nearest the enemy he ran forward ever in the front, the cape of his coat flapping out like the wings of a bat, presenting an appearance that amused us even at a time like that.

As we passed the line of marines in the rifle-pits and behind the sand hills Parker ordered them to fall in with the assaulting party, which they did.

The enemy, warned by the whistles of the fleet, realized that the crucial moment was at hand, and soon the whole sea front of the main fort was swarming with men, who poured a terrific and continuous hail of bullets into our ranks as we drew nearer every moment. The men fell like ten-pins along our line

A seaman running just at my side dropped with a bullet just back of his ear, and so saved me; another to my left fell with a shriek that he was killed. I tore open his shirt and found but a skin scratch making a line across his chest, the sting of which had frightened him, but on my assurance that he was all right he soon was on the run forward with us.

The two days' firing from the fleet had here and there torn gaps in the palisades which led to the beach, and as the front of the first division charging up the hard beach below the high-water mark reached the end of the palisades they shrank back from the withering fire and turned up on the north side of the palisades toward the fort.

Through one of these gaps in the palisades, about one hundred and fifty yards from the face of the fort, young Acting Ensign Robley D. Evans, of the *Powhatan*, already wounded in one leg, gallantly advanced, but instantly fell under the terrific hail of bullets, having his leg again pierced above the knee entirely disabling him.

As the third division charged up Evans saw his classmate, Ensign James H. Sands, of the *Shenandoah*, coming up on the run, and called out to him to come to his aid. Sands instantly sprang through the palisades to his side, and, aided by a sailor who had joined him, in the face of that hail of bullets poured on them by the enemy, dropped down, and, using silk handkerchiefs as tourniquets, soon stopped the loss of blood and saved his life.

Sands ordered the sailor not to leave the side of Evans until he could see him in a safe place, and then going back through the palisades struggled through the mass of seamen until he rejoined his own men some sixty yards nearer to the fort.

That sailor evidently performed his duty nobly and faithfully, for as he helped Evans to the rear he was himself wounded

and fell by his side, where they were both found later near the beach over one hundred and fifty yards from the fort by Acting Ensign Smalley of the *Pequot* and his men, who, aided by Lieutenant John R. Bartlett, of the *Susquehanna* (who, having been at the very front of the assaulting party, was coming up from the stockade) carried Evans up the beach to the temporary field hospital, where he received the attention that saved his leg, Bartlett aiding the surgeon in cutting Evans' trousers to get at his wounds which they dressed.

With the *Gettysburg's* men Lieutenant Lamson and his officers had reached a point about seventy yards from the fort, when their advance was checked by the pack of sailors ahead of them, and all laid down flat upon the sand close to the palisades.

Those gallant Lieutenants, B. H. Porter, Flag Lieutenant, and S. W. Preston, commanding the *Malvern*, who as classmates had graduated from the Naval Academy, who had together been captured by the enemy in the Harbor of Charleston, and who had side by side been in the Confederate prison at Columbia, S. C., from which they had not long before been released, were killed near each other in the very forefront of the assaulting party.

As the officers and men at the head of the column reached the breach in the palisades close up to the salient angle of the fort, Ensign George T. Davis, of the *Wabash*, Master's Mates A. H. Aldrich, of the *Ticonderoga*, and J. M. Simms, of the *Minnesota*, and several men, charged through and attempted to mount the slope of the bastion. All were instantly shot down, except Davis, when Parker calling to them to get back of the palisades they did so as quickly as they could, but left one seamen dead just beyond the opening.

The dry sand of the beach at that point had been by wind

and storm drifted and driven in hillocks more or less shallow like waves, and was heaped up compactly against this angle of the palisades.

These hillocks or dunes had been torn and holes here and there cut into them by the bursting shells from the fleet, and into them, additionally protected by the high palisades, crept the officers and men as fast as they could.

The great mass of the sailors, back of them, and out of wind, lay flat on the sand, in the open, receiving the uninterrupted fire of the enemy from the parapet, the bullets every moment adding to the dead and wounded.

Captain Breeze, tiring of this slaughter, jumped to his feet exclaiming "Rise men and charge!" and I well remember his erect form and heroic bearing as he stood facing the enemy, regardless of the hail of bullets around him. ✓

Some of the men near the beach in the more exposed positions started to the rear. Again Breeze sang out, "Charge! Don't retreat!"

I was close to the palisades, and was rising up to obey him when I heard some one off to my right sing out "What does he say? Is it to retreat?" The last word "retreat" was repeated from different points at once, when, misled thereby, the mass of men rose like a covey of partridges, and as fast as their legs could take them fled down the beach, followed by the grape and canister from the heavy guns on the "Mound" which had reopened upon our retreating column. ✓

Lamson had gone on a dozen yards ahead of me in the first charge and had fallen wounded severely. Left in command of the *Gettysburg's* contingent of men, and seeing that further advance was hopeless, I got my men on their feet and keeping them together we followed the other retreating sailors and marines.

Every wounded man we reached was picked up by my men, and we carried off many of them to the rear. One poor fellow shot through the stomach three of my men and I put upon a piece of board we found on the beach and carried to the field hospital, where I was afterwards informed he died.

At that point I got my men together and halted, and soon gathered in about fifty or sixty men and marched back towards the fort to the relief of those who, keeping close to the shelter of the palisades, could not be reached by the riflemen on the parapet.

We soon got under fire again, when, with shovels that the men had picked up, we began throwing up sand along the crest of the high-water mark, and so working along were advancing the head of our line.

We soon reached a point about two hundred yards from the fort, and found there other men under Ensign J. H. Sands and Carlisle P. Porter, the son and secretary of the Admiral, who had turned back before us on the same mission, and we joined forces. Lieutenant Woodward of the *Minnesota* also joined us afterwards. Darkness was fast coming on when Lieutenant W. B. Cushing joined us, and stating that he had just come from General Terry, whose men had effected a lodgment in the traverses on the western end of the fortifications, and who had requested him to have the sailors relieve the Engineer brigade which held the line of earthworks across the neck, that they might reinforce the troops then in sharp engagement with the enemy in the fort.

We desired to go on to the fort, but claiming his right as our senior officer, Cushing directed us to carry out the desires of General Terry, saying that he would report our good work to the Admiral.

We formed our men in companies, and with our boat flags

flying, marched slowly up the beach to the army entrenchments, where, relieving the Engineer brigade, we were assigned to duty, mounting our guards along the works to warn us of any advance of the forces of General Hoke, which had been reported as moving down from Wilmington.

The reaction from the tension and exertion of our day's fatiguing and exciting engagement in the assault found us as hungry as starved bears. I shall never forget the taste of a piece of bacon I found in the sand, thrown away by some fastidious soldier. I scraped the sand from it and let it sizzle awhile in the camp-fire around which we were keeping watch, and on a piece of hard tack it was as palatable a morsel as any that I have ever tasted since then.

At ten o'clock a rocket told us of the final and complete success of the army and that the vast fortifications were ours; and our cheers at the victory fairly woke the echoes, whilst rockets from the fleet and the noise of steam whistles kept up the jubilations for hours.

We kept our vigils all night, however, to guard against any attempt of the rebel forces from Wilmington, but no demonstration was made.

At 5 o'clock on the morning of January 16, 1865, I celebrated my birthday by slipping off from my men and going back over the line of our charge the day before up to the palisades. Reaching the ground where our last charge was made, I found it covered with the bodies of the dead, the wounded having been carried off the night before. Passing through the breach in the palisades near the salient of the fort I found stretched out, with his head towards the fort, the body of the brave sailor who died nearest the enemy on that charge.

Mounting the slope, which had been torn and beaten out of shape by the shells hurled upon it from the fleet, I descended

into the fort, and went from casemate to casemate which were filled with dead and wounded. Out in the open, where could be seen the burned frames of the barracks and quarters which had been fired by the shells from the fleet, I saw numbers of dead.

I went the length of the parapet from traverse to traverse examining the disabled and dismounted guns on the north face of the fort, and over the scene of the deadly hand-to-hand fighting of the army inside the works, where Curtis and Pennepacker had fallen. On the traverses were the bodies of the fallen, showing how desperately but vainly the gallant Confederates under Lamb and Whiting had defended the works.

Groups of soldiers were making themselves comfortable around fires they had started near the magazines. I went on down to near the river front to the sally-port where our gallant soldiers under Ames, Pennepacker and Curtis had won their entrance to the works.

Returning, I went south along the batteries on the sea front down to the great "Mound" examining the guns on the line.

The great 150-pounder Armstrong rifled gun was intact, and I made a sketch of it, as well as of the "Mound."

My sketch book I found in the Navy Department archives about a year ago, it having been turned over shortly after that war to some official in the Department by my father, Admiral Sands.

My sketch of the "Mound" battery was made the frontispiece to Volume XII of the Naval War Records.

Turning back I went into the casement under the north-east bastion of the fort where I found a magnetic battery in place, connected with wires leading out through the cotton sand bags.

I ran outside and down the slope, where I soon found an up-turned end of a rope of wires wrapped in oiled linen.

The ends of the wires were welded together by the cutting blow of a shell which had exploded, and cut it through, thus saving scores of lives, for the wires ran to several large torpedoes which had been buried in the sand over which we had been massed. I cut off a piece of this wire, and still retain it as a souvenir, and once showed it to Colonel Lamb who had commanded the fort at the time. He recognized it, having installed the plant, and he said that this explained why his orders, given at the proper moment to fire the torpedoes, had not been obeyed. He said that thinking that the man in charge had disobeyed his order he had directed that he should be shot, but that when the man found that the wires would not work he had run away.

I picked up several other mementoes, grape and canister, as I returned down the beach, and when about a mile from the fort was met by an officer just landed with orders for me to return to the *Gettysburg* to which my Captain, Lamson, had been carried severely wounded.

I went on board and had scarcely gone below deck when the terrific explosion of the magazine of the fort occurred, the shock of which could be felt even on the water. Running on deck I saw the great pall of smoke spreading umbrella-like over the fort.

Two of the *Gettysburg's* officers, Acting Ensign Lughton and Assistant Paymaster Gillette, were killed by the explosion, having, after leaving me at the boat on landing, gone direct to the parapet of the fort, reaching its face opposite the magazine at the instant of the explosion.

Ten out of the seventy of the *Gettysburg's* men in the assault were killed or wounded.

In the afternoon Acting Master Charles Dahlgren, executive officer of our vessel, went ashore and visited the Con-

federate wounded. He was complimenting Colonel Lamb on his gallant defense of the fort when an army officer present said "Colonel, we gave you hell, did we not?" To which Lamb replied, "If we had not been misled by the sailors and marines into believing that theirs was the main attack of the combined Army and Naval forces, we would have given you Army fellows hell."

And so it was. In that belief, on seeing our men massed and charging, Colonel Lamb had called all his forces to the parapet of the sea front, leaving only about 148 men guarding the sally-port near the river, and concentrated his rifle fire upon our defenseless sailors, who were slaughtered like sheep; and when he discovered his mistake and marshalled his men against the Federal troops, already inside of the fort, he was too late for anything but a stubborn, desperate and useless resistance to our victorious army.

But the sacrifice of those gallant sailors from our fleet had accomplished its good end, and, when the troops had overwhelmed the handful of rebels on the west, they met and out-fought the men Lamb brought up against them and soon were in possession of the traverses and earthworks within the main fort, and thence fought on until the battle was won.

That the defense should have so stubbornly continued from 4.30 P. M. to 10 o'clock that night before victory became complete made us proud of the men who had fought against us, for their courage and daring was that of Americans, although their cause was a bad one.

The gallantry of the Confederates there was not only shown in that hand-to-hand fight with the Army on the parapet. Throughout the terrific bombardment their guns were fought with skill, until one by one they were disabled; the turrets and decks of the monitors bore witness to the rebels cool,

accurate aim; one of them, the *Canonicus*, having been struck thirty-six times in the fight. whilst many other vessels bore the marks of shot and shell.

To have so fought under the storm of shell from forty-four vessels was a grand test of courage, even for veterans.

The next day the smaller vessels passed in over the bar into the river. Fort Caswell was blown up by its garrison, and the batteries on Zeek's and Smith's Islands were destroyed and abandoned, thus putting us in complete control of the two entrances to the river.

Cushing set the range signal lights, and two runners, the *Stag* and the *Charlotte*, were captured the first night, and the *Blenheim* on the third night. They had anchored, and were jubilating on the happy ending of their trip, when our boarding officers astounded them by warm welcomes to hospitalities as our prisoners.

I was informed the next day after the victory that Cushing had kept his promises to us on the beach, having gone at once to the Flagship *Malvern*, where he detailed to the Admiral what he had seen of our services ashore in the assault, and at the same time he congratulated my father, who was present, on the safety of his sons.

Two days afterwards the Admiral ordered me to examination for promotion before a board of which Lieut. John Weidman was the president, and, being favorably reported upon, I received my promotion to the rank of Acting Master within ten days thereafter upon reaching the Norfolk Navy Yard.

I had been placed in temporary command of the *Gettysburg*, and carried north as passengers Commodore John Rodgers and Brigadier General Barnard, who bore to the Secretaries of Navy and War the exact details of our glorious victory.

The capture of Fort Fisher ended blockade-running on the

Atlantic Coast. In that crowning combat of the Navy's work in that war were engaged a list of officers whose abilities and brilliant services are cherished memories of the service.

There were Thatcher, Radford, Schenck, Gordon, Glisson, Sands, Alden, Almy, Truxton, Ramsay, Selfridge, Temple, Phelps, Ridgeley, Clitz Weaver, Belknap and Sicard; all of whom I have known throughout their subsequent careers in the Navy, which carried them to high rank and honors.

The junior officers in the regular line who served there have all won distinction since, and to-day the survivors of them are month by month stepping up into the grade of Rear Admirals, well qualified by their careers to maintain the prestige of their service in honor and glory.

Were I to attempt to enumerate all the gallant officers of the Volunteer Navy who, whether on shipboard or in the land assault upon that fort, braved death and wounds, and won commendation for their courage and daring and efficiency, this narrative would become too lengthy.

They were men whose occupations in private life were peaceful; but in that time of their country's need they had responded nobly. They filled the vessels of every fleet, and having served faithfully (many with great deserts for specially distinguished services) they, at the ending of the war, retired quietly from service with their country's grateful thanks for their duty well done.

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